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McComish focuses on Legislature

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State Rep. John McComish recently sat down with *The Ahwatukee Republic* to reflect on his two years in the Legislature and the status of Ahwatukee Foothills, as he prepares to leave a job he has held for 10 years - president of the Ahwatukee Foothills Chamber of Commerce.

His official last day at the chamber helm is Sunday.

McComish, 63, quit to devote more time to the Legislature, where the second-term Republican was elected as House majority whip recently.

What's the biggest change in your life since joining the Legislature?

"There is a real broadening of knowledge and interests. That is probably the biggest change," he said.

He's had to learn more about more subjects, such as water policy.

What's the biggest problem facing Ahwatukee Foothills businesses?

"The businesses here are mostly small businesses. Oftentimes, the owners and managers live in the area so the business needs are not so different from local and individual needs," McComish said.

Those needs include transportation, resolving the questions about whether and where the South Mountain Freeway will be built and affordable health insurance, he said.

McComish said he hopes that in 2007, the Legislature will enable more companies to offer employees simple and affordable medical insurance plans, as well as offer more tax breaks for businesses.

What are the biggest issues facing Ahwatukee Foothills now that it is a mature 33-year-old?

"The community needs to make sure it doesn't let its shopping centers and neighborhoods run down. It is getting close to being built out. It needs another library and fire station and more ballfields, and about the only place to put those is on the 620 acres of state trust land in the western part of the community," he said.

Is it too late to provide more jobs within Ahwatukee Foothills so residents

don't have to commute?

In a word, yes, McComish said.

"We can nibble around the edges of that issue but in a real substantial way, unfortunately, that ship has left the harbor," he said.

When the community was being planned, planners didn't stick with the village concept of making it a community where residents could work, live and play, he said. "We provide too much of a place to live and play and not enough of a place to work," he said.

Developers rushed to build houses instead of being patient and letting some land eventually be developed for commerce, which takes a long time, he said. For example, some vacant land in western Chandler and Tempe only recently has been developed with retail and industries.

What will be the big issues in the Legislature next year?

The 2007-08 budget, immigration, education and transportation, he said.

The state's economy is expected to slow down and legislators will probably have to deal with a tighter budget, McComish said. The state will have to continue to toughen the border if the federal government doesn't, he said. And he also wants to see performance pay for teachers expanded to more districts and to have freeway construction accelerated.

Where does the term "whip" come from, in reference to the House majority whip position he will hold?

McComish said that term apparently stems from British foxhunts. The person in charge of keeping the hounds in line was called a whip.

"So the whip is supposed to keep the members organized while we are chasing bills," he said.

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